

electors. The view I took on the question two years ago, and still entertain, is this. The State—to use a word which is recognised as embracing the public authorities, executive and legislative, as dealing with the public interests of the whole community—has a right to determine to what system of education, or, indeed, of any other work, it will contribute public funds and levy taxation on the whole community. It has a right to do that, and especially has a Government, based upon what is in this country almost universal suffrage, a right to do so when acting through the mouths of its representatives; but it has always appeared to me that a wise and politic Government will consider how to establish an institution which will work in harmony with the convictions of all in furthering the object in view, and will not set up a permanent cause of discontent, a system which it does not end with the attainment of the object, but is most likely to create a banded discontent hostile to the administration of Government in other things. I therefore say that I deem it politic so to shape your legislation as to cause the minimum of hostility and opposition. I am quite aware of the very great attention which is being paid at the present moment, and for some time past, in communities such as yourselves, on the question of elementary instruction for the people; and I say that it ought to be our object to establish a system which will have the ready assent and adherence of all sections of the community. Now, the objection which is taken by some sections of the community—not the Catholics only, but by many others as well as them—is that they are obliged to put their hands in their pockets and contribute towards a system of education which they do not consider entirely fair to themselves. I am informed, upon very good grounds, that there are no people in this community who object to being rated for public instruction, or to a proper inspection by Government officers, so as to insure that the education provided is sufficient—then, I say, why in God's name should we drive any portion of the community who are willing to be rated, willing to have a Government inspection as an assurance that sufficient education is given, why should we drive them to say, "We think it is unfair to us that we should be taxed for a system which we cannot conscientiously approve of when we are quite willing to be taxed for a system which will provide the same instruction and superadd something more?" There is a great deal of what I may call "claptrap" in the term "secular education." We see candidates not only in this province, but in other places outside of New Zealand, saying, "We are all for secular education only." Having given considerable attention to the subject, I am competent to form some opinion upon it, and I say absolutely that I do not know what secular education is, and I have never yet found anybody competent to tell me. The moment you get beyond writing and arithmetic, and pure mathematics, even if you come to geography, you cease to have secular education, and you more or less traverse the conscientious opinions and scruples of the people. Take the large question of history. No person can be said to be in any degree educated who knows nothing of history. Who agree upon history, amongst those holding conscientious views? What one standard history will they accept as true and correct in its facts and in its inferences? It is impossible to give a purely secular education the moment you depart from the subjects I have indicated, without trenching more or less upon religious convictions. What have we at heart in this country? Do not we want to see our children and those of our neighbors educated? Do not we want to take an honest pride in thinking that the native born New Zealanders shall not blush, when meeting people elsewhere, at not possessing that elementary instruction which shall render them capable of further instructing themselves? I think it is wise and politic for a state so to shape its instruction as to enable all sections of the community cordially to pull together for the purpose of having their children mutually instructed. I have heard it said that if you give aid to any school set up by any religious denomination, which imparts the instruction required by the Government, subject to the periodical inspection of Government officers, while it teaches something else, some particular form of belief or opinion, you are creating heart-burning and acrimonious feeling between the people of the country. I will give you an illustration which I know to be a fact, and which can be corroborated by some gentlemen who are present—one an old friend of mine, the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir David Monro, who is here to-night (Applause). I do not know what are Sir David Monro's opinions on this question, but I know that he has taken a considerable interest over a long period of years in instruction, and that he consented, at my request, so long ago as 1863, to be a member of a commission to consider and report upon a system of instruction to be introduced into the province of Nelson. There is a school in Nelson which has been in existence for many years. It was established under the superintendence of Father Guin, and for many years there was a larger proportion of Protestant children than of Catholics attending it, and it was admitted to give the very best elementary instruction in the province of Nelson, and, with the exception of the Nelson College, no school could compete with it. There was no imputation of proselytising; and people who were anti-Catholic sent their children there. I could name one who almost shudders when he talks of the Catholic religion, and yet he sent his sons there, and never complained that their religious convictions were tampered with. That is worth a whole bushel of assertions to the effect that denominational schools must necessarily engender acrimonious feelings between persons of different creeds. I appeal to that school as a complete denial to such an assertion, and I say more, that the rivalry between the different schools makes a great difference between them as the difference between a well-bred horse going by himself on the road and the same horse when he is stirred by competition with others. You all know the advantage of competition. Let the school be subject to the Government inspection as to whether it gives sufficient elementary instruction as to justify its being granted a portion of the amounts contributed by the different denominations. The different denominations do not ask for the money contributed by others, but they say, "let us have a fair proportion, head for head, of what we contribute, or our own rates returned, wherever there is a certain number of children (I think it is 30 in Nelson), and the power of indicating what school is to receive our rates." That is one of the most reasonable plans, and I hope that my friend, Mr Montgomery,

who is the present head of the Executive, and I trust will continue to be so, an able man, and one who has thoroughly the interest of the province at heart, who holds large colonial views, and who will take the large statesmanlike view that it is always wise to have a contented people instead of an organised, banded, discontent. I hope he will see, when the time comes for further considering the existing law on the subject, that there is so much to be said on the side of the question upon which I have just enlarged, as will prevent him from absolutely setting up a deaf ear on the subject. I have very great hopes in his sagacity, and I believe him to be one of these people who will not refuse all his life to reconsider it, simply because he has once committed himself to an opinion. My experience in public affairs—and I claim to have had some considerable experience—is that those who hold office are always being educated. They are finding constantly not only what can be done, but what cannot be done. The great object of all administrative and legislative bodies is first to find out what is the best thing. If they can do the best thing, in God's name let them do it, if not, let them do the best practical thing. (Cheers.) I say it without the least regard to the result of the election, which I may say is a matter of so much indifference to me that it was quite an accident that I consented to come forward at all. If I may not be considered presumptuous in giving some advice, I say that we should from year to year always consider our actions on all large questions, and that our laws shall not be like those of the Medes and Persians, absolutely unalterable. Those of us who are not learning something from year to year to cause them to change their opinions, people who stop their ears against all advice, are not the people I would recommend you to elect as legislators. A writer in the 'Lyttelton Times' wrote a letter desiring to know whether I was going in to repeal the Education Ordinance. (Hear, hear.) My first intention was to reply through the paper, but I thought it better to do it verbally to-night. If I am elected, I am not going to run a-muck, and say I will repeal the Ordinance. I want to see it amended. I think the time will come when, quite apart from this question and on mere technical grounds, the Ordinance will require amendment. If I can judge from the remarks of candidates and electors throughout the province during the last fortnight, they want to give the Ordinance a fair trial in order to find out its weak points, and not to amend it hastily. I am quite content to wait until it is admitted that the Ordinance requires to be amended, and then I shall endeavour, if you honor me by electing me, to bring forward the consideration of the principles which I have ventured to submit to you this evening, not before. I hope there is no evasion in that. (Applause.) The 'Lyttelton Times' said that I cleverly evaded it. I don't want to evade. What object could I have in doing so? I should be false to my whole political career if I did that. I hope I shall not now be considered as having evaded the question. You know what you have to expect. When the time comes for the amendment of this law I shall be found, if I am in the Council, advocating an amendment in the direction I have pointed out; and I think it is fair, having reference to deep conscientious convictions which many in this room may think to be wrong. What are we but a congeries of a number of different units, brought together and contributing to the carrying on of public affairs, not only by our voices but by our pockets and purses. I hope the question will be considered more on the broad statesmanlike and politic view than it has yet been in Canterbury. I take leave to say that I do not think it has been as carefully considered from that point of view, the point of view of having the whole community working together for the object of public instruction for the young. That is what we have to get, and any way that will get it with the least jarring and opposition will have my support. I do not know that I need enlarge any more on this subject. I should not have said so much had I not been expected to do so.

Mr Clephane inquired if Mr Stafford considered a uniform rate on rich and poor a fair one.

Mr Stafford did not consider it would be fair if the schools were entirely maintained by the rates. Education was a great benefit to the community, and he thought that the people who had a large stake in the country should pay proportionately. They must consider, however, that the rates were only a small portion of the cost of education, and they could not go to the same extreme as if they were the whole cost. The principle he would like to see would be perpetual endowments for education, which would keep pace with the requirements of the place. He should like to see a fund from behind which would provide education in advance of the requirements of the people, and that could only be done by considerable public endowments. If they were to depend entirely on rating, he thought that the property of the country should bear more. He was of opinion that on most questions a property tax was much fairer than a special tax. He had advocated such a tax for years, at a time when he was missed for it. It was said that such a tax was unknown. That might be so. He did not know any colony that had a property tax yet, but they must all have a beginning. They were going to have heavy taxation in a few years, and he did not know a fairer shape in which it could come than as an income tax. He was very glad to find that a number of people were now to be found who agreed with him in this view.

Mr Clephane asked how Mr Stafford accounted for the fact that although Protestants attended the school at Nelson, the Catholics could not attend the Protestant school here.

Mr Stafford was giving no opinion as to what the Catholics did here or did not. He had merely instanced that school as a proof that denominational schools were not necessarily productive of acrimonious heart-burnings.

Mr Hall asked if it was not inconsistent for the Catholics here to refuse to send their children to the Government schools?

Mr Stafford was not there to answer for the Catholics. It had been said that he had the Catholic vote, but if so he was not aware of it. He had been asked by many persons to come forward as a candidate, but so far as he knew not one of them was a Catholic. He was not in the confidence of the Catholics, therefore he must decline to say what was or was not inconsistent on their part.

In reply to Mr Hall, Mr Stafford stated that he considered that in this country there was no one race of people who should ride